

The Excellency of the Knowledge of
CHRIST JESUS.

A ⁵
SERMON

PREACH'D at the
PARISH-CHURCH
OF
Redgrave in SUFFOLK,

On SUNDAY Feb. 26, 17²⁰₂₁.

By HENRY STEBBING, M. A.
Rector of RICKINGHALL. ^K

LONDON, ^d

Printed for JONAH BOWYER, at the Rose in
St. Paul's Church-yard. 1721.

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CHRISTIANITY

SERMON

PARISH CHURCH



By the Rev. J. H. ...

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T O

JOHN HOLT Esq;

S I R,

IF there had been a Variety of Methods before me, by which I might have obliged you, and I had been left to my own Determination, the publishing this Discourse would not, I do assure you, have been among the first that I should have chosen. For in truth I can have little reason to think that I shall do the World a Pleasure, by offering my hasty Thoughts upon a Subject which has so often employed the Pens of the best Writers. But there are so few Instances in which I find it in my Power to make myself acceptable, that I could not permit myself to deliberate; nor indeed could I see how I should be able to justify myself in denying your first Request, who have so great a Right at all times to command me. To make use of YOUR Name, Sir, is a Liberty which I ought not on this Occasion to have taken with-

iv The DEDICATION.

out Necessity; and I am sensible, that the doing it may be a Means to raise Expectations, in which those who come not to the reading of this Discourse, prepared with the same degree of Candour with which you heard it, will find themselves disappointed. But as I had no other way of excusing myself to the Publick, I hope you will forgive me; and for the rest, I shall think it a sufficient Recompence that I have the Honour to be,

S I R,

Your most obliged, and

most obedient Servant,

HENRY STEBBING.

PHILIP. III. vii, viii.

*But what Things were Gain to me, those I counted
Loss for Christ.*

*Yea doubtless; and I count all Things Loss; for
the Excellency of the Knowledge of Christ Jesus
my Lord.*

FOR the understanding the true Intent and Meaning of these Words, we need look no farther back than to the Verses immediately foregoing, where the Apostle has laid before us a compendious Account of the Advantages he was under whilst he was a Jew. Ver. 5, 6. *Circumcised the eighth day, of the Stock of Israel, of the Tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews, as touching the Law, a Pharisee: Concerning Zeal, persecuting the Church; touching the Righteousness which is in the Law, blameless.* Upon which Account he declares (ver. 4.) that if there were any Merit to be pleaded, any Good to be obtained by being a Jew, no Man had greater Pretensions than himself. *But what Things* (says he) *were Gain to me* (i. e. those Things which I, whilst I was a Jew, did rec-

kon or esteem to be Gain) *I have accounted Loss for Christ*; so far have I been from placing any Confidence upon them, or ascribing to them any real Worth or Excellency, that with respect to the present Advantages I am under, I have looked upon them as nothing, or even as worse than nothing. *Yea doubtless, and I count all Things but Loss*; I have the same Opinion of every Privilege, and every Qualification, I have heretofore attained, or may hereafter attain unto; I count them all, I say, as nothing in comparison to *the Excellency of the Knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord*.

The Words then do very plainly set forth to us the great and transcendent Excellency of the Christian Religion, concerning which a few Observations will not, I hope, be unreasonable. For the more we are persuaded of the Excellency of our Religion, the more satisfied shall we be in the Wisdom of our Choice, and the more strongly excited to the Practice of that Piety and Vertue which our Religion recommends and engages us to. Now I do not purpose to trouble you with a nice and exact Calculation of the difference in point of real Worth between *Christianity* and *Judaism*, nor between *Christianity* and any other Way or Method of Religion which the Providence of God hath heretofore thought fit to appoint, or which Men have superstitiously invented to themselves; it will be as much as the Time before me will allow, and

withal

withal as much as the present Occasion seems to require, to shew you in general wherein the Excellency of *Christianity* does principally consist, by which means you will easily be able to judge how far it surpasses any other Religion which shall offer itself to stand in Competition with it.

To determine rightly then concerning this Matter, it will be necessary to consider what is the great and ultimate End of all Religion; for that which best answers its End is always most excellent, supposing that the End itself be so. Now Religion has the same End which all other things have that are desirable, to wit, the Happiness of those who follow after it. It is usually said indeed that the Glory of God is the End of all Religion, which is also true. But the Happiness of Man is the End even of the Glory of God, or rather it is itself the Glory of God; for God is glorified by the Happiness of his Creatures. We glorify God by obeying his Laws, for this is an Acknowledgment of his Sovereignty over us. But why doth God give us Laws, unless it be that he may lead us to Happiness? Why doth he require Obedience, but that we may obtain a Benefit by discharging our Duty? That Religion therefore which shews the easiest and the surest way to the best and truest Happiness, must needs be the most excellent; and the Excellency of *Christianity* appears in all these Respects, viz. how as still

First, In the Nature of that Happiness which it proposeth.

Secondly, In the Certainty which it gives us of that Happiness. And,

Thirdly, In the Means which it prescribes for the Attainment of it.

First, I say, Christianity is the most excellent Religion in this respect, that it proposeth to us the best and the truest Happiness, which will appear by considering, that as to its Kind, it is adapted to the most excellent Faculty in ourselves (I mean the reasonable Soul) and that as to its Duration or Continuance, it will be for ever and ever. Of this sort of Happiness we have a good deal of Experience in this Life, enough, if we value it as it deserves, to make us fond and eager after more. And more, yea infinitely more, shall be given to those for whom it is prepared, i. e. to all who will prepare and qualify themselves for it, when having laid aside the Clogs and Incumbrances of Flesh and Blood, they shall arise purified into a divine and angelick Nature. In what the Happiness of a Future State does consist, we cannot particularly say; the Scripture has described it to us in general only, as a State wherein are Joys without measure as well as without end, and this by the
 Images

Images and Representations of Things most eligible in this Life, as a *Kingdom*, a *Crown*, and the like. The reason of which (if we may presume to look so far into the Secrets of the Almighty) may be, partly because the Praise of Vertue would have been a great deal less (or rather no Praise at all would have been due to it) if God had given us a full and entire Prospect of the heavenly Glories; and partly because *this Knowledge is in itself too wonderful and excellent* for us, such I mean as is not suited to our present Capacities and Apprehensions. But whatever the reason of this is, or how much soever we may be in the dark as to the Particulars of the Happiness of a Life to come, this we are sure of, *viz.* that it shall be without the least Mixture of Sensuality. We shall then be pure Reason; our Happiness therefore must be purely rational; for there can be no sensual Pleasure where there are no sensual Desires to gratify.

But this which I am now mentioning as the Excellency of the Christian's Happiness, may perhaps appear to some as one of the greatest Objections against it. And here indeed lies the main Difficulty, to give Men addicted to Sense even a Notion or Idea of Happiness, distinct from and superior to that of Sense. Such as these will be apt to say, "Away with your Pleasures beyond the Grave, and Dreams of a Kingdom we
" know

“ know not what. Why, hath not God pre-
 “ pared for us an earthly Paradise, wherein
 “ we should have Appetites that would never
 “ cloy, and no want of any thing to gratify
 “ them? How much better would it have
 “ been, if we had been suffered to eat and
 “ drink and sport ourselves thro’ endless Ages,
 “ than to die, and awake again to new De-
 “ lights, whereof we hear much Talk indeed,
 “ but have no Experience?” Thus Children
 cry for Toys, because they have no Know-
 ledge of better Things! But if you would
 know why God hath not thus dealt with us,
 remember that he hath made us reasonable
 Creatures; and when you have well confi-
 dered this, you will not find it, I believe, so
 hard to understand that there may be, yea,
 that in the nature of the thing there must be
 a Happiness peculiar to us as such, which not
 only equals, but as far exceeds that which is
 proper to the Animal Life, as Reason itself is
 more excellent than Sense. Every distinct
 Order of Beings that are capable of Happiness
 (nay, I had almost said every distinct Being
 of the same Species) has a sort of Pleasure pe-
 culiar to itself, arising from something that
 is peculiar in the Frame and Constitution of
 it. The manly Entertainments of a mature
 Age are not the same with the little Diver-
 tissements of Youth or Childhood; nor are
 the Pleasures of a Child the same with the
 Pleasures of a Worm, or of a Snail. Some-
 thing

thing I say there is peculiar in each, which as it is more or less removed from Reason, makes them comparatively, or with respect to one another, more or less excellent. Now we should consider ourselves whilst we are in this Vail of Flesh as in a State of Childhood or Infancy; or to come as near to the thing as possible (which no Comparison you can frame will fully express) we should consider ourselves as imprison'd in the Womb, when our Faculties are as it were bound up, and not wide enough to admit of that Fulness of Joy which will flow in upon us when thro' Death we shall be born to a State of Immortality.

In short, if that Superiority which we stand in with respect to the several Orders of Creatures below us (of which we are all of us apt to have Apprehensions large enough; if this, I say) be founded in Reason, it must then be plain and evident to us all, that the best and truest Happiness is that which is proper to Reason; and consequently that our Happiness must be so much the more perfect and compleat, by how much the more it is purged from the Mixture of Sense. And what, I pray, is the infinite Happiness of God, but the Happiness of infinite Reason? But if nothing but Experience will satisfy, this is what we desire to appeal to. For, as I said before, there is enough of this sort of Happiness to be met with on this side the Grave, to give us
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at least a Notion of it; and 'tis often experienced even by such as will not be at the pains of being religious. For what is that Satisfaction which a Man feels within himself in the Pursuit and Acquisition of Knowledge, which more or less every Art; every Science yields? Is not this a Pleasure distinct from; and very often superior to that of Sense? But indeed the true way to make the Experiment is to become good, by which to all the several ways of gratifying our Reason; we shall add this, which will minister to us the greatest and most lasting Comfort of all; I mean the Sense of our having acted wisely in the most important Concern; the Sense of our having shewn ourselves grateful to our best and only Benefactor, and of our having secured to ourselves hereby an everlasting Interest in his Favour, which is more to us than all the World. Now these are but the Foretastes of those Joys which shall hereafter *be revealed in us*; and how much even these exceed the Satisfaction of Sense, is a thing which those who have tried do find to their unspeakable Benefit, how hardly soever those who have not had the Experience may be brought to believe it. A good Man has this Advantage, that by what he has tasted of sensual Pleasures within those Limits which Reason allows, he understands what they are, and so is qualified to judge of the difference. But a bad Man has this Unhappiness peculiar

peculiar to himself, that in a Matter of so much consequence, wherein his very Soul lies at stake, he is sure to go away without hearing any more than one half of the Case. But,

Secondly, Christianity is the most excellent Religion, not only with respect to the Excellency of that Happiness which it proposes, but also with respect to the *Certainty* which it gives us of that Happiness; which if we consider comparatively, and with a View to what it was before the coming of Christ, we shall very quickly perceive how truly it is said of him, that he *hath brought Life and Immortality to Light by the Gospel*. Some Footsteps there are indeed of the Belief of a Future State to be met with in the Histories of all Ages, to which the Light of Nature has contributed much, and those Revelations which God from time to time hath been pleased to make of himself have contributed more. But this is all but Darkness in comparison to that Clearness of Knowledge and Fulness of Assurance which we receive from the Gospel. The Heathens had generally either very wrong or very faint and imperfect Conceptions about it; and even those who by the help of a superior Genius had raised themselves above the common and ordinary way of thinking, and have said the finest things about the Immortality of the Soul, and the Happiness of a Life to come, even these,

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I say,

I say, have spoken of it with so much Diffidence and Hesitation, as plainly shews, that it was rather what they wished and hoped for, than what they were able with any manner of Certainty to promise to themselves. And no wonder; for this indeed is a Point in which Nature seems to be but a lame and ignorant Guide. For what is the way that she takes to lead us to this Belief? Why, she first directs us to God, the Creator of all Things, whom we behold cloathed with the glorious Perfections of infinite Justice, Goodness and Holiness. Then she bids us to look down upon ourselves, and consider the Methods of his Providence, by which his Favours are dealt out among us with an uneven and undistinguishing Hand, some swelling and mounted up with the Gale of prosperous Wickedness, and others sinking down under the Load of oppressed Vertue and Innocence. And a just Inference indeed it is, that since in this Life *all things happen alike to all*; since there is *one Event to the Righteous and to the Wicked, to the Clean and to the Unclean*, there must, if God is God, be another Life, in which he will shew himself to be the Patron of Vertue, by adjusting these Inequalities, and making a proper distinction in his Dealings, according to the different Merits or Demerits of Men. This way then brings us at last to a Future State; but it doth not lead us to a State of Immortality, since even
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a Temporary Retribution may be of such a sort as will abundantly compensate for the greatest of Evils which the very best of Men may suffer in this short Span of Life. In short, Nature teaches good Men to expect a Reward, but it gives no assurance of that rich and exceeding great Reward which the Gospel proposes.

If we go to the *Jews*, we shall not find the Case much clearer even among them. Under the *Patriarchs* we find no express mention of the Belief of a Future State, tho' if we consider the many Revelations that God was pleased to make to good Men in those Days, and the great Readiness and Cheerfulness of their Obedience to the Commands of God under the most unpromising Circumstances, and even under the greatest Hardships, it will leave us little room to doubt whether they had such a Belief or not. Certain it is that this Belief did generally obtain amongst the later *Jews*, which they gathered it is likely partly from the Light of Nature, partly from God's general Promises, partly from the Traditions of their Forefathers, but principally from the Prophets under the Law, some of which have expressly directed them to it. And this in general you may observe, that the nearer you come to the Times of the Messiah, the more clear and express Revelations you shall find concerning a Life to come; these Revelations being (as the in-

comparable *Grotius* hath somewhere observed) intended by Providence, as the Dawning of that glorious Day which was to shine forth under the Gospel Dispensation. But tho' the *Jews* before the coming of Christ were under a general Belief of a future State, yet as to the Nature and Circumstances of it, they were for the most part very grossly ignorant. As to the End of wicked Men, they were under very great Uncertainty about it, some believing that they should be raised, and others not. And as to the Happiness even of good Men, all indeed believed that it would be long, but many were of Opinion that it would not be eternal. Besides, the Happiness which they expected, was not such a Happiness as I have described, and as the Gospel teaches us to expect, but a gross and carnal Happiness, consisting in the Affluence and Abundance of every thing which has a Tendency to gratify the Bodily Appetites: And this was the occasion of that idle Cavil of the *Sadducees* against our Saviour concerning the Woman that had seven Husbands, *Whose Wife should she be?* These *Sadducees* denied a Future State, and they laid this as a Trap in our Saviour's way, with which they were wont to ensnare and perplex the *Jewish* Doctors, who supposed that *in the Resurrection* there would be *eating and drinking, marrying and giving in Marriage*. Whence happened all this, but thro' want of Clearness in the

the Divine Revelations hitherto vouchsafed? Now these were the Mistakes which our Saviour came to rectify, and to declare once for all under the highest Authority, not by general and indefinite Promises, nor under the Vail of Types and Figures, but peremptorily and without reserve, that *there should be a Resurrection both of the Just and the Unjust; a Day when God by him should judge the Secrets of Mens Hearts, and render to every Man according to his Works. To them who by patient continuance in well-doing sought for Glory and Honour and Immortality, Eternal Life; but to them who were contentious, and obeyed not the Truth, but obeyed Unrighteousness, Indignation and Wrath, Tribulation and Anguish upon every Soul of Man that doth evil.*

But what Assurance, you'll ask, does even the Gospel give us of these Things? I answer, the greatest of all; and unless we will lay aside all the Authority of historical Evidence, we can no more doubt of them than we can of the Being of a God; of which whosoever is resolved to doubt, ought first of all to doubt of his own Existence, and the Existence of every thing which he sees about him. He who says there is no God, is a Contradiction to himself; for the very Breath with which he utters it, loudly speaks that there is: And a Man may as well say there is no God, as doubt whether, supposing that there is a God, he will be true in fulfilling his Word,

Word. Now thus it is that the Veracity of God comes to be concerned in the Case, *viz.* that he has set his Seal to the Doctrine of a Life to come, by those Signs and mighty Wonders which he wrought by the Hands of those whom he sent to bear witness of it to the World; and this, I say, is that which the common Evidences of Fact, which we admit of in other Cases, will not permit us to call in question — But the Subject opens itself too wide upon me, and suggests too great a variety of Matter to be brought within the Compass of a single Discourse. And indeed it may well be spared, considering that I am speaking to those, not who want to be persuaded to become Christians, but, who being already such, may (thro' God's Grace) apply these Observations to the strengthening of their Faith, and be stirred up, both in Heart and Life, to give Praise and Glory to him *who bath called us out of Darkness into his marvellous Light.* Proceed we therefore,

Thirdly, To the last of those Particulars, from whence the Excellency of *Christianity* does principally appear, to wit, the *Means* which it proposeth for the Attainment of this Happiness. And of these a very brief Description will suffice; for *what doth the Lord our God require of us, but to do Justice, and to love Mercy, and to walk humbly with our God?* Or, to use the Words of the Apostle, which express

express the same thing, what doth he require of us, but *to deny Ungodliness and worldly Lusts, and to live soberly, righteously and godly in this present World?* After the receiving of the Faith (which is supposed in every Christian) and besides those few positive Precepts of the Gospel, which are in no wise burdensome, *Christianity* is nothing else but the Law of Nature revived and perfected. And if you say that the keeping of this Law is a great thing, I answer, so it is; for to be thoroughly vertuous is indeed a great Attainment. But comparatively, or with respect to the Promises of the Gospel, it is but very small, and considering what sort of Creatures he hath made us, no more than what is absolutely necessary. Remember, Brethren, what I said before, and what we all of us experience, that God hath given us Reason; and that the Happiness reserved for us in the World to come is the Happiness of Reason. Tell me then, what could God have required less to prepare and qualify us for this Happiness, than the Use and Improvement of Reason? Or how is it not absurd to suppose that he should have made an Indulgence of Sense to the Debasing of Reason consistent with the Measures of obtaining an Inheritance in that Kingdom, in which there is nothing that has any relation to Sense? The Means ought always to bear a Proportion to the End; and as it would be a ridiculous

culous sort of Management to keep a Child in Ignorance, whom you intend afterwards to breed up for a Philosopher; so it is every whit as irrational to suppose that a sensual Life is in the very nature of it at all proper to be made the way to Heaven. But this is a Case which requires no great arguing; for in truth when God requires us to be holy, he doth but in other Words command us to act like ourselves; and in this Conflict between the Flesh and the Spirit, the Gospel sounds to us no other Alarm than this, *Be strong, and quit yourselves like Men.* This is the great Hardship I say which *Christianity* lays upon us; to be what God has made us to be; to do that which generally and in the main we should (if we are wise) chuse to do, tho' we had no other Reward before us than merely the Pleasure of doing it. For it will be hard to suppose that Man is the only absurd Composition in the Universe, and that whilst all other Agents regularly pursue the Tract which Nature has assigned them, it should be his Part only to run into eccentric Motions, and that his greatest Happiness should lie in acting least of all within his proper Sphere. True indeed it is that the Way of Vertue is sometimes rugged and difficult, insomuch that *if in this Life we had Hope only*, Reason would in many Cases prove a very troublesome and unhappy Guide. But here it is that the Reward of a Life to come offers

offers itself to support us ; upon this Account it is that such a Reward becomes indeed proper ; for if Vertue were always its own Reward, we should have little reason to look for any other. Put the Case now, if you please, in the worst Light you can. Suppose your Reason calls you one way, and the Pleasures, the Profits, the Sorrows, the Terrors of this Life shew you another, what will you do? Will you yet take Vertue for your Guide, and under her Conduct *press forward thro' all Difficulties for the Prize of our high Calling in Jesus Christ* ; or will you quit your Pretensions to the heavenly Crown ; resolve to be as happy as you can here, and be content to be as miserable as God can make you hereafter? The Case will admit of no long Deliberation. Be but as wise here as you are in other Matters of infinitely less Concern, and you are sure to make the happy Choice. Consider only what you should think of the Man, who, rather than submit to a few Days Confinement, and undergo the Fatigue of applying wholesome, tho' sharp Remedies, should suffer himself to linger out a long and tedious Life in Pain and Sickness ; think of this, I say, or any other Instance of the like sort, which your own Fancy will easily suggest, and the Question is answered. But it will be hard indeed to find out a Comparison which will fully reach the Case. For between a few Days and the longest Life of Man,

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and between the Tediouſneſs of the Remedy and the Trouble of the Diſeaſe, there is ſome Proportion. But between the longeſt Life of Man and Eternity there is no Proportion; nor are the greateſt *Sufferings of this Life worthy to be compared with thoſe Pains, and thoſe Glories*, which ſhall be the Reward of our Conſtancy, or the Punishment of our Cowardice.

But ſtill you'll ſay, that to maintain a conſtant Steadineſs in the Way of Vertue, ſo as never at any time to deviate, is a hard thing. And indeed ſo it is, too hard for Man in his corrupted and degenerate State to perform. But for this reaſon God (to our great Comfort) doth not require it, but enjoins Holineſs in ſuch a manner, as to leave all poſſible room for the Repentance (that is, for the Reformation) of the Sinner. I do not mean that Holineſs is not always our indiſpenſable Duty, for this it certainly is, and neceſſarily muſt be. But the Caſe is, that God, if we repent, accepts us, tho' we have done a great deal leſs than we ought to have done. His Commands reach to all, and to every Perſon at all times, ſo that we can never do a vicious thing and ſay we have not ſinned; but *if we ſin, we have an Advocate with the Father, even Jeſus Chriſt the righteous, thro' whom we ſhall be forgiven, if we do ſo no more; for at what time ſoever the wicked Man turneth away from his Wickedneſs, and doth that which is lawful and*
right,

right, he shall save his Soul alive. And who now can forbear to cry out with the Apostle, *Behold the Goodness and Severity of God!* His Severity appears in this, that he allows no Man at any time to do wickedly. And his Goodness appears in this, that he punisheth none but the Incorrigible, none but those who not only do wickedly, but who persist in Wickedness, whom neither his Mercies will invite, nor his Judgments terrify. A convincing Evidence this, how truly it is said of him, that he *is not willing that any should perish*, and which (by the way) is so far from being a reasonable Encouragement for a Man to sin, that it ought rather to raise in him the tenderest Sentiments of Honour and Gratitude; and since it is always most base and disingenuous to offend that Goodness which is most hard to be overcome, the more ready God is to forgive, the less ready ought we to be so to behave ourselves as to stand in need of Forgiveness.

So that upon the whole I think it appears, that the Gospel proposes to us the greatest Happiness at the least Expence possible; which Point I might farther have illustrated, by shewing what a mighty Power the very Prospect of the Excellency of that Reward which is laid up in Heaven for us, has to allay and sweeten the Troubles of this mortal Life, which is such, that if you will believe those who have experienced it, a Man

may even *glory in Tribulations*, and triumph in the midst of Sufferings. But I must not trespass too far upon the Patience that is indulged me. I shall therefore only beg leave to add two short Observations, and I have done. And,

1. If *Christianity* be so excellent a Religion; if it proposes the greatest Happiness under the most easy Conditions, how comes it to pass may some say that there is so much Wickedness to be found amongst those who have taken upon themselves the Name and Profession of *Christians*? Is it because in truth they are not Believers, but only pretend to be so? This I fear is sometimes the Case, tho' I hope comparatively but very seldom. For indeed such is the Light and Evidence of the Gospel, that it is the very last thing I can suppose of any Man whom I know to have Sense, that he is under a settled Principle of Infidelity. But the great Bane of true Piety is Carelessness, and want of Consideration, which will not, even tho' we are persuaded of the Truth of these Things, suffer us to lay them to heart with that Seriousness of Application which is necessary to render them effectual upon our Lives and Conversations. If we see a Man falling down a Precipice, which lay plainly in the way before him, we do not presently infer that he has no Eyes. Nor must we say that a Man has no Faith because

because he acts as if he had none ; for it is a great Mistake to suppose that a mere Belief of a Future State is enough to make a good Man ; it must be such a Faith as is lively and operative ; such a Faith as is always present to our Minds, and when we are about to yield to any Temptation, pulls us back with this silent Reproach, *How can I do this great Wickedness, and sin against God?* How can I indulge this unreasonable Passion, and for an empty Bubble barter away my immortal Soul? A serious and considerate Temper is the Bulwark of Vertue, which when once thrown down, Appetite, like an armed Host, rushes in upon her, and divides the Spoil. 'Tis the want of this which runs Men into the grossest Absurdities in common Life ; and what wonder is it then that it should do so in Religion too? The Power of Faith is indeed very great ; but it is all one in effect, whether a Man has no Faith, or whether he never considers that he has any. Wherefore,

2. Let us learn hence not to judge of the Truth of any Religion, or of any Persuasion in Religion, by the Lives of its Professors ; nor conclude, that because a Man acts ill, therefore he entertains ill Principles. For if a good Life is not always the certain Effect of a good Religion, a wicked Life can be no Argument of a bad one. But tho' 'tis wrong for Men to argue thus, yet there is nothing more

more common; and amongst the many Ways by which the Progress of *Christianity* has been obstructed in the World, we must not look upon the scandalous Lives of *Christians* as the least considerable. Take heed then, Brethren, that we be not found amongst the Number of those who throw *Stumbling-blocks and Offences in the Way* of others. But there is another Consideration which more directly concerns us, *viz.* That *to whom much is given, of him much will be required.* God expects that our Improvements should bear a Proportion to the Means he has given us; and you know what was the Portion of the *unprofitable Servant*, who had hid up his *Talent in a Napkin* when his Lord came to demand back *his own with Usury*. What would have been his Punishment, if instead of hiding up *one Talent*, he had squander'd away *ten*! A Question which it is proper to ask, because this indeed is the Case of the wicked Christian, who has received his *ten Talents*, which he not only improveth not, but abuses, to the Dishonour of his Lord. And what then shall we be able to say for ourselves at the great Day of Accounts, when we shall be found to be a great deal worse qualified than many upon whom the Light of the Gospel never shined! Surely tho' we are now so unwise as to contend with God, we shall not then dare to tell him to his Face that he is a *hard Master*, and that we know
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what it was fitting for him to require of us better than he. But if we should even thus far draw a bad Example into a Precedent, we know the Issue. God will justify himself in the sight of Men, and in the sight of Angels, and to our eternal Shame consign us over to that *outer Darknes*, where *shall be weeping and gnashing of Teeth*.

But, Beloved, I hope for better things tho' I thus speak. And may God by his holy Spirit so direct and rule our Hearts, that by serving him faithfully in this World, we may in the World to come obtain Life everlasting. To whom be Glory and Praise for ever and ever. *Amen.*



F I N I S.

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Principles, farther asserted; in answer to *Sylvius's*
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Hare, D. D. Dean of *Worcester*, and Chaplain in
Ordinary to his MAJESTY. pr. 2 s. 6 d.

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